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boat journey round Stanley

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A Boat Journey round Stanley Pool.

By the Rev. T. J. COMBER, F.R.G.S.

ENCLOSED I send you a sketch-map which I have made on returning from a boating trip round Stanley Pool. We may hope soon to see this lake-like expanse of the Congo properly surveyed, but at present very little is known about its real extent and character, and the present sketch may therefore be found useful.

In Mr. Stanley's map, published in his book, 'Through the Dark Continent,' the Pool is given as a sudden broadening out of the river, from two to seven miles wide and about nine miles long, after which it is represented as suddenly contracting where it rushes down through a two mile channel over the Ntamo Cataracts. But Mr. Stanley had not then (nor has he since) been round the piece of water to which his name has been given. The little trip I have made round it has been the first circumnavigation, though not a complete and thorough one. The natives on the shores of the Pool are not by any means unanimously in favour of the presence of white men, and we did not feel it advisable, in this preliminary tour of a missionary boat, to hug the shore, and thread the narrow channels inside the sandy and grassy islands which line it. In the present inimical disposition of the natives an attack would have been very likely, and although we might be ready to defend ourselves, we did not wish to have to do so.

The result of our rough survey gives Stanley Pool a length of 23 miles, and a breadth of equal amount; it includes an area of about 350 square miles instead of Stanley's 55 or thereabouts.

The position of Kintamo (at which are the European settlements of Leopoldville) is, according to Mr. Stanley, long. 15° 44' 30" E., lat. 4° 13' 20" S. From this point bearings have been taken by prismatic compass of the following places: Mfwa, Mfwa Point, Mpila, Mpiete Point, the upper entrance, right bank, the east and west points of the large island, Mbangu, Nshasha, &c.

On the 18th ult. Mr. Bensley (my colleague) and myself, accompanied by Dr. Sims, of the Livingstone Inland Mission, left here in our steel sectional boat (tender to our new steamer *Peace*) with the intention of circumnavigating the Pool as far as possible. As it happened, on the day of starting, there arrived at Mfwa (Brazzaville) four Europeans of M. de Brazza's staff, and not being sure of the reception they had met with, and the state of the people's feelings, we simply sailed by the town of Mfwa and steered for the prominent hill of Mpiete, skirting along the low islands. To reach this place took us a full day, and we slept on an island near by. Behind the point of Mpiete, a fine wooded spur about 350 feet high, we reached the Dover Cliffs; and found them not to consist of chalk, as Stanley thought when he looked at



them from a distance, nor pipeclay as he has thought since, but *sand*; the whitest silver sand, varied occasionally by an admixture of brown sand, and here and there by black masses of forest, which by contrast add to the beauty of the cliffs. Dover Cliffs are about 200 feet high, and are cut up in a most fantastic way by the floods of the rainy season. The rains above, and the river deep and fairly strong at the foot, eating away under the cliff, have evidently caused some fearful avalanches of this white sand. Riven and torn into strange shapes, the sand rears itself in lofty columns and pinnacles, has its castles with their buttressed walls and towers, and presents a magnificent sight.

Not thinking of possible danger we approached the foot of the cliffs, and got on shore, but immediately sank knee deep into the treacherous yielding sand, which was very loose and sloppy. Finding the footing thus unsafe, and seeing the towering detached columns of sand, almost direct over our heads, we thought it best to content ourselves with merely taking specimens of the sand, and to go on our way.

In the afternoon we got abreast of the entrance of the Pool, which is about $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles across, and flanked by grand wooded hills with occasionally green slopes bare of trees, to the height of from 400 to 500 feet. Sailing across below the three small islands of the mouth, we came down quickly with the stream past the village of Kimpoko, and slept on an island opposite the large town of Nkunga. Crossing over the following morning to the islands which line the southern shore, we entered into one of the inner channels, and winding among the grassy islets we quickly passed the towns of Ndolo and Nshasha, and arrived at the station by 2 P.M. on the third day.

The current is fairly strong in the Pool, averaging about 3 knots. In going up we of course kept close to the banks, keeping in the strong water in returning. In turning the corner at Nshasha, the islands opposite which are rocky, the water rushes along as if through a sluice, being broken here and there by rocks. Navigation here of course requires care. A little below Nshasha is a point off which sometimes runs a very strong current, and which is called Kalina Point from a sad tragedy which occurred last December. An Austrian officer, M. Kalina, attached to Mr. Stanley's party, was drowned here by the capsizing of his canoe in ascending the river. The boat was overloaded, and the unfortunate officer was heavily accoutred, with thick shooting boots, and was imprudently sitting on the top of his boxes instead of low down in the canoe. On reaching this point the current capsized the canoe, and all the occupants were swept and whirled along into the middle of the river. M. Kalina soon sank; some five or six of the people were seen by us struggling in the middle of the Kintamo Rapids, but they disappeared before they reached the cataracts; three men, however, managed to get close in shore in Kintamo Bay, and were saved. Two other Europeans of Mr. Stanley's party lost their lives in a similar way

close by the Ibari Nkutu or Kwa river. These were Lieutenant Janssen and Abbé Guyot of the Algerian Mission. Only yesterday, a canoe with five Houssas of Mr. Stanley went over and was engulfed by the cataract, the occupants not understanding the force of the current. Even in Kintamo Bay the current is strong and one has to be careful.

The Pool is full of islands, chiefly of sand overgrown with tall grass, Borassus palms, and occasionally a species of bamboo resembling, but not growing so thick as, the Indian species. On the islands of the southern bend we found papyrus, which I had not seen since leaving the neighbourhood of Manyanga. Lying along the centre of the Pool is a great island about 17 miles long, covered with thick forest, and uninhabited save by elephants, buffaloes, and other game. Plenty of channels are found between the islands, some of them very broad, as the map will show. Those to the north-west of the island are uncertain, and there is danger of constantly running upon sandbanks. Close to the large island, however, the channel is probably deep and good. The best course is to steer along the south-east shore of the large island.

Game is abundant, especially hippopotami and birds. During our three days' journey we saw several hundred hippopotami, generally in herds of from ten to twenty. At first they did not take the trouble to sink down, but a shot fired at them made them more wary, and they would rarely permit a second shot unless fired immediately, while they were confused. None of them ventured to attack our boat, although it was such a strange object in the more unfrequented parts of the Pool. An enormous crocodile, however, with head out of water, made a savage rush at our boat from a distance of 50 yards; at 15 yards a Martini bullet stopped him and he disappeared. For a crocodile to attack a boat is so strange, that at first we thought it was a log of wood fastened to some net, and past which the current was rushing; as it approached nearer we thought it must be a hippopotamus (so big and broad was its head), but it proved to be a crocodile.

Wild ducks abound in small flocks of three to ten. Solitary, tall, soldierly birds (a species of adjutant), looking of exaggerated size in the refraction of early morning, stalked about the sandbanks, always alone. We have at the present time one of these enormous birds at our station, who walks about swallowing anything that has the taste of fish or flesh. Even a dead monkey did not come amiss to him the other day, but went down his enormous gullet *whole*, only the tail causing inconvenience as it hung outside his bill. Pelicans are frequent in their V shaped flocks of twenty or thirty. Scissor-bills, with coral-like beaks and feet, are found in flocks of one or two hundred.

Hills varying from 50 to 500 feet, and generally forest-clad, surround, with few intervals, the whole of Stanley Pool. Especially picturesque and grand are those which flank the upper entrance. The hill at Kintamo, where are the European settlements, is over 200 feet in

height. On its slope, at a height of about 50 feet from the river, Mr. Stanley has cut an imposing terrace on which the African International Association houses are built. The Livingstone Inland Mission has its buildings at about the same height from the water, but nearer the native town of Kintamo. This station of the Livingstone Inland Mission is stated merely to be a steamer depôt. Our station (Congo Mission, Baptist Missionary Society) is built on the top of a hill and commands a magnificent view of the Pool and surrounding country. Between Leopoldville and Lema to the south and Mbangu to the east the country is almost a dead flat, being about 20 feet only above the river. At Mfwa (Brazzaville) and towards Mpila there is a stretch of table-land (said to be very swampy) about 100 feet high, backed by hills upwards of 300 feet high.

One of the things that most struck us in going round the Pool was the paucity of towns and people. After passing Mfwa and Mpila we saw but one or two canoes until in our return we drew near to Nshasha. An abandoned farm on the hill called Mpiete; a few houses showing among some trees just past the Dover Cliffs; a town or two (said to be small) near the entrance on the south bank; Nkunga, Mbangu, and the towns of the Nshasha district, seem almost to complete the population of the banks of Stanley Pool. Nkunga and Mbangu are said to be large towns. Lema too, a little way inland and south of Nshasha, has the reputation of being very populous, and a great ivory mart. Nshasha has several large towns, with the people of which we have long been on visiting terms, and where Mr. Stanley has an outstation. Kintamo (at our feet) has a population of about 1500 people. Mfwa, opposite "Brazzaville," is a cluster of four or five small towns.

The new steamer built for the use of the Congo Mission of our society (the *Peace*) has been conveyed in sections from the coast to our station, and is now almost all here. Next month her reconstruction will probably commence. It formed about 800 loads complete, which have been brought up by natives; to such an extent has native carriage developed, that upwards of 300 loads have been brought from Manyanga during the last month. This largely does away with the necessity of imported carriers, such as Krooboys and Zanzibaris. We are hoping soon to make a much more extended journey in our little steel boat. Mr. Stanley's last reported station is at the confluence of the Ikelemba, and he is probably now in the country of the Bamangala.

Arthington, Stanley Pool, October 6th, 1883.

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